DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 385 524 SP 036 146

AUTHOR Thornton, Stephen J.
TITLE The Enacted Curriculum: A Deweyan Perspective.
PUB DATE Apr 95
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 18-22, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Environment; *Curriculum Development; Higher Education; High Schools; *Professional Autonomy; Public Schools; School Policy; *Student Teacher Attitudes; Student Teachers; Student Teaching; *Teacher Effectiveness; *Teacher Influence; Teaching Methods; *Teaching Styles
IDENTIFIERS Dewey (John); New York City Board of Education

ABSTRACT

A case study of a student teacher shows that even under conditions of perceived and/or real constraints on their autonomy, teachers retain great power to shape enacted curriculum (defined as the outcome of interactions among teachers, students, and materials). A student teacher (Ken) was assigned to teach 12th-grade U.S. history in a New York City high school, which had a highly structured curriculum and prescribed policies in instructional arrangements. The student teacher's views of proper curriculum content and appropriate instructional procedures did not always coincide with school policies and the preferences of his cooperating teacher. Yet, even in the earlier stages of his student teaching, while adhering fairly strictly to the required developmental lesson format, Ken was able to weave in material from other lessons thus providing for a coherent sequencing of subject matter. His own voice came through in the sincerity and respect shown to students in his responses to their questions. In the final weeks of his student teaching experience he used other formats successfully, such as small group instruction and role play. This student teacher was more successful in putting his own mark on the curriculum and instructional strategy than he gave himself credit for. This case study suggests that teachers may be wholly or partly oblivious to their own successes. Ken's persistent refrain that he was not free to teach what and how he wanted was truer in his mind than in the classroom. Such a belief can act to disempower teachers, as it did Ken. The study illustrates that even when prescriptive policies on curriculum and instruction are in place, teachers retain room for maneuver, whether they fully appreciate it or not. (Contains 13 references.) (ND)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Thornton

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

THE ENACTED CURRICULUM: A DEWEYAN PERSPECTIVE*

Stephen J. Thornton
Teachers College, Columbia University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 385 524

John Dewey (1938/1963) once observed that "a single course of studies for all progressive schools is out of the question" (p. 78). When he wrote those words, Dewey could scarcely have imagined that a half-century later, under the guise of national standards, that something akin to a single course of studies for all the nation's schools would be proposed. Nonetheless, I will argue in terms broader than Dewey's admonition that "a single course of studies" is unlikely to be the result of national standards or any other mandate. For all schools, albeit to varying degrees, the curriculum that ultimately matters is the one enacted on a classroom-by-classroom basis.

More specifically, in this paper I shall use the experience of a student teacher to illustrate the construction of enacted curriculum. Enacted (or interactive) curriculum is defined as the outcome of interactions among teachers, students, and materials. In contrast, a preactive view construes curriculum as a body of materials prepared in advance and intended for instruction (Jackson, 1966).

Context of the Study

The student teacher, whom I shall call "Ken," was assigned to teach twelfth-grade United States history in a New York City high school; I was his supervisor. This particular New York City school, I

*Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 19, 1995.

SP036146

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

should point out, is not one of the only too common physically and academically bleak schools portrayed so vividly by Jonathan Kozol (1991) in Savage Inequalities. Rather, this school is handsomely appointed and boasts a highly academic curriculum designed to prepare students for the nation's most prestigious colleges and universities.

My focal concern is to use Ken's case to illustrate that, even under conditions of perceived and/or real constraints on teacher autonomy as curricular-instructional gatekeeper (Thornton, 1991), teachers retain great power to shape the enacted curriculum. More particularly, the school where Ken was placed has a highly structured curriculum and prescriptive policies on instructional arrangements. Significantly, Ken's views of the proper content of United States history curriculum and appropriate instructional procedures did not always coincide with school policies and the preferences of his cooperating teacher.

Ken's perspective on the school's preferred instructional arrangement provides a good example of his conflict with policies. The school uses what is known in New York City (and, perhaps, other places) as the "developmental" lesson.

> Briefly stated, the "developmental" lesson seeks to deal with one concept in a limited time frame by raising a problem (motivation), exploring possible answers to the problem (development), and finally, restating and applying the concept (summary and application) to new situations. (Association of Teachers of Social Studies in the City of New York/United Federation of Teachers, 1985, p. 18)

As we shall hear later in his own words, Ken frequently found the developmental lesson format confining and wished to experiment with a broader range of instructional strategies.

Methods of This Study

This study is based on a variety of sources. In this paper, I rely primarily on my supervisor's field notes, formal and informal interviews with Ken, and the journal Ken kept through the course of this almost five-month long stint of student teaching. But I have also made some use of a wide variety of corroborating sources, including information about Ken's background and his work as he moved through the Social Studies Program at Teachers College.

The methods used to make sense of the information collected in this study are drawn from Elliot Eisner's (1991) notion of educational connoiseurship. I wished, in other words, to disclose what was educationally significant about what I observed. I did not, however, embark upon this study with a pre-set agenda as to its focus. Rather, I sought emergent meaning.

Of course, I was not just a disinterested observer of Ken's teaching, but also his supervisor. I had a clear mandate to help Ken do the best job of which he was capable. Thus, my research role was influenced by my supervisory role. I do not see that this presents any problem to the study's credibility as long as it is acknowledged as helping shape the study's eventual direction: to disclose how and why Ken enacted curriculum.

This study was also influenced by the extraordinary interest Ken had in improving his teaching. I doubt that I have ever worked with a student teacher who, although doing a remarkable job for a beginner, requested so much criticism. "How could that lesson have been improved?" was a constant refrain. This, of course, tended to lead me to focus on the imperfections of his teaching.

As I have already noted, Ken's placement at the school extended over a five-month period. During that period, I met with him frequently at Teachers College to go over lesson plans. I also, of course, visited him at the school site; these visits occurred about once a month.

In the remainder of this paper, I will trace the development of Ken's curricular-instructional beliefs and actions over the course of his school placement. Specifically, I will compare and contrast two lessons--one near the beginning of his placement and one toward the end--and place them in the context of his beliefs at those times.

A Portrait of Ken's Beliefs and Teaching

Ken's placement began with frustration on a number of fronts. The most important frustration was Ken's belief that his cooperating teacher's curricular priorities were not entirely suitable. Ken wrote in his journal:

> In my opinion we're taking too much time to cover the "forgettable presidents" (Grant-Cleveland) about 4 lessons total. Plus 3 review lessons on Reconstruction.

On a brighter note, however, Ken observed:

> the one thing we are doing though...is a good entire lesson devoted to Native Americans, one lesson on 1890's feminism & another on Booker T. Washington vs. W.E.B. Dubois' philosophy.

Ken was pleased that these topics were an improvement on what the class where another student teacher was placed were doing: "The other class is doing 2 lessons on agrarian reform & turn right into the Progressive movement." Clearly Ken, who had been influenced by his experience as a teaching assistant for a course on women's history, thought his class's approach better reflected contemporary thinking in historical scholarship. Nevertheless, he found having to share planning with his cooperating teacher "trying on one's patience."

Ken did find some room for maneuver in the curriculum as his cooperating teacher was willing to let Ken introduce some new subject matters. Nonetheless, a considerable portion of the curriculum was dictated by the cooperating teacher's wish to keep his three sections of the course covering the same content and to cover the main contents of the assigned textbook. The curriculum was also significantly shaped by what the cooperating teacher believed would appear on the forthcoming New York State Regents' examination.

Initially, Ken found even less flexibility in the teaching strategies he was permitted to employ than in curriculum. The week after the journal entry already quoted, he wrote about the use of the developmental lesson format. He reported that he wanted to experiment with other lesson types such as debates and small groups. He also noted that at times a lecture format would be useful for imparting information on topics such as Native Americans which he believed were

treated inadequately in the assigned textbook: "And lecturing is considered verboten!!" Nonetheless, Ken conceded that the developmental lesson format "seems to work very well." I interpreted this as meaning that the developmental lesson format provides some structure for beginning teachers whose insecurities about early classroom encounters are usually considerable (e.g., Ryan, 1970).

One of the earliest of Ken's lessons that I observed reveals his close adherence to the developmental lesson format. This lesson was on the battle over ratification of the Treaty of Versailles. Ken moved through these political events in more-or-less chronological order. As the developmental lesson format requires, he began with a problem and then explored the possible answers to two problems: Why the Treaty was not ratified and who was responsible for the Senate's decisions. He also incorporated some primary sources including extracts from the Covenant of the League of Nations as well as speeches by President Wilson and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. The lesson relied almost entirely, however, on recitation with Ken posing a question and a student answering it.

Despite this lesson's formulaic design, Ken was perhaps more successful than he realized, both pedagogically and in incorporating his personal voice. From a pedagogical perspective, Ken's lesson effectively provided for a coherent sequencing of subject matter. For example, he unobtrusively wove in material from other lessons with remarks such as Wilson wanted "to make the world safe for democracy, a familiar phrase by now, I'm sure." His personal voice also came

through in the sincerity and respect shown to students in his responses to their questions and remarks. As I was to learn later from students, they both noticed and valued that Ken related to them as persons and not just the recipients of the information he was disseminating (see Noddings, 1991). Thus, more than he realized, Ken's lesson had aspects that transcended the formulaic lesson structure that he was compelled to employ.

As I have already suggested, Ken did not appear to realize fully the extent to which he was finding his own voice in the classroom. For example, the same week as his lesson on the ratification struggle, Ken noted in his journal that even though he was now sometimes permitted to employ small group activities that he "loved," he still felt he "in some ways was...teaching for others instead of doing it the way I will next year." As late as the end of his student teaching experience in June, Ken remarked: "in some cases, he [the cooperating teacher] allowed me to do something else [other than coverage of the textbook]...[but] for the most part, we kind of followed the textbook" and the dictates of the Regents' test.

My final observation of Ken, however, suggests to me that he was more successful in putting his own mark on the curriculum and instructional strategy than he gave himself credit for. In this lesson, Ken used a role play, not the developmental lesson format, to deal with the 1992 presidential campaign. Earlier, three students had been assigned the roles of President Bush, Governor Clinton, and Ross Perot. Each "politician" made a brief presentation and this was

followed by questions from the "audience." Ken said little throughout the lesson; the students largely ran their own lesson. There was a high and stimulating level of engagement throughout. To my eyes, the lesson was exemplary in both its instructional format and academic substance.

Conclusion

This case study of Ken enacting curriculum suggests two main issues to my mind. First, "success" and "goodness" remain elusive concepts in educational research and practice (Brickhouse, 1993; Thornton, 1993). There is, of course, a well-founded fear that once some practice is labeled "good" or "successful," it will be reduced to a prescription and implemented in contexts where it is not appropriate (see Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). We need look no further than process-product research on teaching to see how this has worked in the past. But, in this regard, Ken's case is also intriguing because it suggests that practitioners may be partly or wholly oblivious to their own successes. Ken's persistent refrain that he was not free to teach what and how he wanted was, as we have seen, truer in his mind than in the classroom. Such a belief can act to disempower teachers as, to some extent, it did with Ken. Moreover, my experience as a supervisor suggests that teachers' abilities to judge their own success is likely to be particularly limited when they are just starting out.

Finally, Ken's case also illustrates, to return to my assertion at the beginning of this paper, that enacted curriculum, to varying degrees to be sure, comes with the territory in teaching (Jackson,

1992; Thornton, 1991). Commonly discussions of enacted curriculum are framed in normative or exhortative terms such as, say, the superiority of interactive over preactive approaches to curriculum (e.g., see Noddings, 1979). As we have seen, however, even in a state with standardized curriculum accompanied by a high stakes test tied to it and in a school with prescriptive policies on curriculum and instruction, teachers retain room for maneuver--whether teachers (and supervisors) fully appreciate it or not.

REFERENCES

Association of Teachers of Social Studies in the City of New York/ United Federation of Teachers. (1985). W. S. Dobkin, J. Fischer B. Ludwig, & R. Koblinger (Eds.), A handbook for the teaching of social studies (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Brickhouse, N. W. (1993). What counts as successful instruction? An account of a teacher's self-assessment. Science Education, 77, 115-129.

Dewey, J. (1938/1963). Experience and education. New York: Collier Books.

Eisner, E. W. (1991). The enlightened eye. New York: Macmillan.

Jackson, P. W. (1966). The way teaching is. In The way teaching is (pp. 7-27). Washington, DC: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Jackson, P. W. (1992). Untaught lessons. New York: Teachers College Press.

Kozol, J. (1991). Savage inequalities. New York: Crown.

Noddings, N. (1979). NIE's national curriculum development conference. In J. Schaffarzick & G. Sykes (Eds.), Value conflicts and curriculum issues (pp. 291-213). Berkeley: McCutchan.

Noddings, N. (1991). Stories in dialogue: Caring and interpersonal reasoning. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education (pp. 157-170). New York: Teachers College Press.

Ryan, K. (Ed.). (1970). Don't smile until Christmas: Accounts of the first year of teaching. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Snyder, J., Bolin, F., & Zumwalt, K. (1992). Curriculum implementation. In P.W. Jackson (Ed.), Handbook of research on curriculum (pp. 402-435). New York: Macmillan.

Thornton, S. J. (1991). Teacher as curricular-instructional gatekeeper in social studies. In J. P. Shaver (Ed.), Handbook of research on social studies teaching and learning (pp. 237-248). New York: Macmillan.

Thornton, S. J. (1993). Toward the desirable in social studies teaching. In J. Brophy (Ed.), Advances in research on teaching (Vol. 4) (pp. 157-178). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.